

FRED STEELE 1935-2014

American hot rodder, custom car and early Ford enthusiast Fred Steele, passed away in February this year, at Fort Myers, Florida, USA.

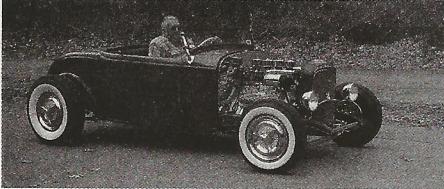
Fred was well known in the USA and Australia, having been into hot rods since the early 1950s. I made contact with Fred around 1963 when I started corresponding with him when he was a member of the LA Roadsters. Fred, originally from Maynard, Massachusetts, was restoring a



1940 Ford Deluxe Coupe and wanted to build it right hand drive. RHD Fords are very thin on the ground, New Zealand did not get any due to WWII, in the UK they are rare, rusted out or gone due to war, and in Japan, who knows!

I found him a dash shell, as they are asymmetrical and cannot be swapped (glovebox, gauge panels) like previous models. He also wanted the gear selector plate RH side, used on Fords here from 1940 to 1948. The gearbox selector for American models is on the LH side, but the Lincoln Zephyr 1938-40 had a bent stick that exited through the dashboard. It came out from the right hand side of the gearbox. This meant the factory had patterns for the RHD Ford gearbox cases and only had to cast up the selector plate for RHD column shift models 1940-48. From 1949-58 it was back to LHD boxes with crossover shafts.

He also wanted a pedal chassis bracket, a LHD stub axle with the extra eye for the drag link, a steering box chassis mount and a RH steering box case. "Don't send the gears," he said, he would fit the American worm and sector.



In due course all was sent. Late one night I got a frantic call from Fred, "Do you still have those steering gears?" "Why?" I asked. "Cos when I steer left I go right and when I steer right I go left." I chuckled and said, "It is simple Fred. Keep it as it is and practice, you will soon get it right!" Fred was not amused. Anyhow I still had the bits and sent them to him, so he could steer correctly. He finished the car and for a little while he probably had the only driving RHD 1940 Ford Deluxe Coupe in the world. We had stopped with him for about three weeks in 1966 when three of us visited the USA on a six-month tour in the later half of that year. Fred and his wife Patricia came out here in the spring of 1969. We had the story of their visit in Custom Rodder #11.

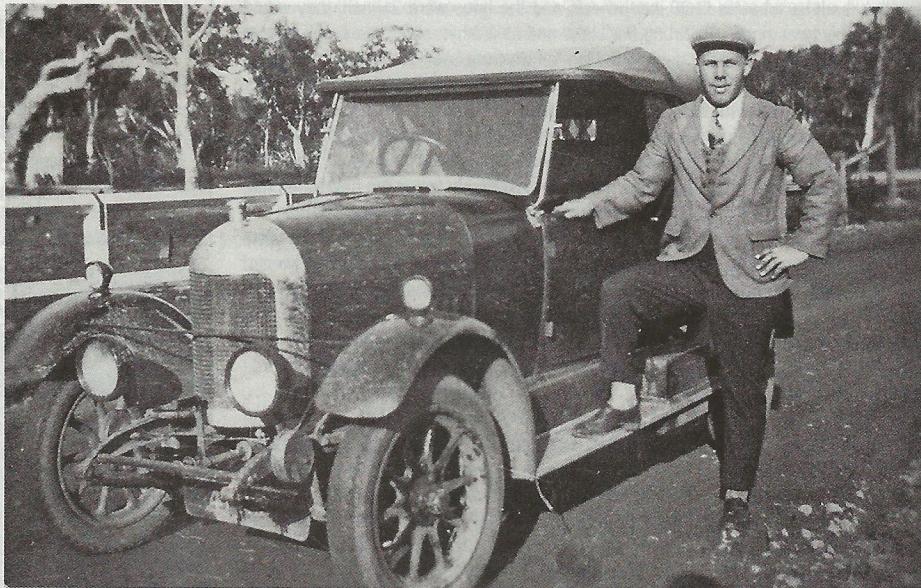
We had communicated with him over many years often meeting up at various times, generally at the Hershey Swapmeet. Quite a few other Aussie car people met and dealt with him over the years, right up to very recent times.

Fred had a fleet of cars, generally Ford products from the Model T to later Lincolns and he had a distinct liking for 1956 Fords. Fred was also founder of the Tyrods, the oldest hot rod club on the American East Coast.

Massachusetts has very cold winters so the Steeles had a Fort Myers, Florida, address, where they headed when the snow set in up north. He was down there when he had a sudden heart attack and died.

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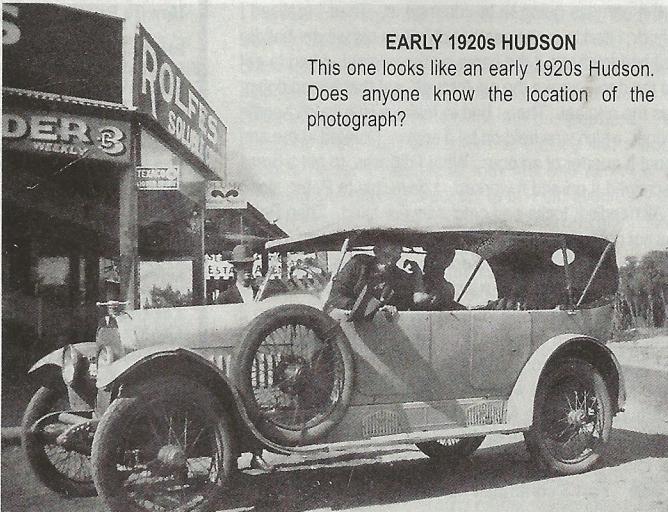
1926 BULLNOSE MORRIS (ABOVE)

Gordon McKinnon with his 1926 Bullnose Morris. A nice period photograph, supplied by Max McKinnon, Gordon's grandson.



1938 HUDSON EIGHT UTILITY (ABOVE)

This one looks like an early 1920s Hudson. Does anyone know the location of the photograph?



This photograph is of an unrestored unit and a follow-up to the mention in our last issue of Australian Automobile Year 1938. There it showed a 1938 Hudson three window type ute, one of only six produced. This one is the more common five window style, recently seen at a repair shop in Rutherford, Vic. This body was most likely built by Ruskin's of North Melbourne. See RC #124.